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The European Green Capital Award. Its Role, Evaluation Criteria and Policy Implications

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特集 都市の評価とランキング

The European Green Capital Award

—Its Role, Evaluation Criteria and Policy Implications

欧州グリーン首都賞

—その役割、評価基準および政策的合意

Henrik Gudmundsson Technical University of Denmark

ヘンリック・グッドムッドソン

1. Introduction

The European Green Capital Award (EGCA) is an honorary award that has been offered by the European Commission to one European city each year since 2010 (Figure 1). The award is given to a city that demonstrates excellence and high ambitious in 12 areas of environmental performance (see Table 1). The winner is found through a competitive application and evaluation process. The process involves three main steps starting with submission of applications from aspiring cities using a predefined application scheme, followed by a technical review conducted by a panel of experts leading to a shortlist of 3-5 candidate cities, and culminating in a 'politically' informed final judgement to pick the winning city undertaken by an appointed Jury.

Despite its name the EGCA award is not only aimed at 'capitals' but can be obtained by excellent performers among all European cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. 'European' in this context extends beyond the European Union to include

cities in neighbour countries connected to the EU, such as Norway and Turkey. So far seven cities have been given the award, beginning with Stockholm, Sweden for 2010 up to the city of Ljubljana, Slovenia who received award for 2016 in June 2014 as the first winner from an Eastern European EU Member State. During its winning year the city will organize events and actions to demonstrate its competencies and share experience with other cities.

It must be stressed that EGCA is not a city ranking scheme per se, but a procedure to identify a winner city among several candidates, with the aim to promote environmental awareness and actions for sustainability among European local governments. A ranking procedure is applied as part of the evaluation process as will be described, but the ranking outcome is not a key message itself. The focus is on promoting good practices using examples chosen among all of the applicant cities with the main focus on the excellence of the winner city (see e.g. Treanor et al 2014).

This article will first describe the background



Figure 1. EGCA logo

Table 1. The 12 evaluation areas (2016 award version)

1. Climate change
2. Local transport
3. Green urban areas incorporating sustainable land use
4. Nature and biodiversity
5. Ambient air quality
6. Quality of the acoustic environment
7. Waste production and management
8. Water management
9. Waste water treatment
10. Eco-innovation and sustainable employment
11. Energy performance
12. Integrated environmental management

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for the EGCA and will then focus on the selection procedure. The topic of 'Local Transport' (one of the 12 performance areas) will be used to exemplify the procedure and some of the measured performance. On this background the paper will briefly discuss some strengths and weaknesses of the approach. The conclusion will provide a summary and briefly reflect on the implications of the award for urban policy in Europe.

The author is a researcher in sustainable urban transport governance and has been involved as a member of the EGCA expert panel with special responsibility for reviewing the 'Local Transport' area. The article does not necessarily represent the views of the European Commission, the Evaluation Panel as a whole, or any participating cities or institutions.

2. The Award Background and History

It is important to note that the EGCA does not have a top-down background. The idea was fostered in 2006 by a group of cities led by the Mayor of Tallinn, Estonia, Mr. Jüri Raitas. The cities felt the need for a European level scheme to promote the status of environmental issues and solutions among

local governments. A review of a broad range of existing environmental promotion schemes and awards was used to build the case for an award scheme (Tallinn City Government & SEI 2006). Later the same year the European Commission accepted the challenge. Nearly 75% of European live in cities, and many environmental concerns are concentrated at the urban level. In 2006 the European Commission therefore adopted a 'Thematic strategy on the Urban Environment' as part of the Environmental Action Programme (European Commission 2006). However, The European Union has limited direct jurisdiction over urban affairs. This is one reason why a 'soft' measure like an award fits well to the European policy context. The award is also somewhat inspired by the concept of the 'European capital of Culture', which since 1985 has shifted among European cities on an annual basis with the aim to enhance European cultural coherence and diversity. In a similar way the EGCA aims to propagate green, sustainable culture and governance.

The general approach has been consistent over time with slight modifications along the way. For example, the areas of evaluation have been extended from 10 to 12 (adding 'Eco-innovation and



Figure 2. 2017 applicant cities (source: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/applying-for-the-award/2017-egca-applicant-cities/index.html>)

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sustainable employment' and 'Energy performance' from the 2014 cycle), and the scope has been widened from cities with 200,000 inhabitants down to 100,000. The smallest city that has been shortlisted as finalist is Umeå, Sweden with 118,000 inhabitants. The largest applicant city so far is Istanbul that is a candidate for the 2017 award (around 14 million inhabitants in the metropolitan area). The applicant cities (Figure 2) are not subdivided by size, but in principle compete on the same factors.

Table 2 shows the number of applicant cities, the shortlisted cities, and the winning city per year. In the first two cycles applications were called for two years at a time. Some cities have applied more than once, and two of the winners have applied three times before finally succeeding.

3. The Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation is entirely based on information supplied by the applicant city governments. The aspiring cities must submit specified information about the 12 environmental areas shown in table 2 in addition to general city data. The information must cover the three dimensions 'present', 'past', and 'future' for each area, hence,

- the current environmental performance of the city, with a focus on predefined performance indicators,
- the actions, achievements and lessons learned leading up to the present situations,
- plans and commitments for the future.

Table 2. Participating cities from 2010 to 2017
(as of December 2014)

Year	Applicants	Shortlisted	Winners
2010	35 cities	Amsterdam, Bristol, Copenhagen, Freiburg, Hamburg, Münster, Oslo, Stockholm	Stockholm
2011			Hamburg
2012	17 cities	Barcelona, Malmö, Nantes, Nuremberg, Reykjavík, Vitoria-Gasteiz	Vitoria-Gasteiz
2013			Nantes
2014	18 cities	Bristol, Copenhagen, Frankfurt	Copenhagen
2015	8 cities	Bristol, Brussels, Glasgow, Ljubljana	Bristol
2016	12 cities	Essen, Ljubljana, Nijmegen, Oslo, Umeå	Ljubljana
2017	12 cities	—	—

Each dimension requires a mix of qualitative and quantitative information. In the first dimension (current environmental performance), quantitative indicators have been specified in the application form for most of the 12 areas. For example 'Proportion of public transport buses classified as low emission vehicles' in the Local Transport area, or 'Proportion of urban water supply subject to water metering' in the Water Management area. The indicators have been defined by the European Commission and EGCA secretariat based on previous initiatives, including the so-called 'European Common Indicators' project (AmbienteItalia 2003) where cities were involved. The application form also requests cities to provide more qualitative information within in each area, such as "achievements in reducing congestion, encouraging a shift away from transport by private car," in the Local Transport area, and "Communication activities to promote Nature and Biodiversity among the public" for the Nature and Biodiversity area. The cities are also encouraged to describe particular circumstances that may cause difficulties for excellent performance in certain areas (such as hilly cities facing obstacles for promoting non-motorized transport). The deadline for submission is in October each year.

The evaluation is conducted by a panel of 12 independent experts, one for each area. The experts are picked by the European Commission and the EGCA secretariat. The evaluators assess the submissions of each city for their area. In addition the experts co-evaluates one other

adjacent area (such as climate change is adjacent to energy). The panel meets to discuss the applications and the draft evaluations across all themes. The experts can also jointly request clarifications from the candidate cities, but the cities cannot provide additional information after the initial submission. The evaluation process takes around four months.

The instruction to each evaluator is to provide a unique ranking of the candidate

cities from highest to lowest within her/his topic area. The ranking must put equal weight on performance on the three dimensions 'present', 'past' and 'future'. The evaluators are otherwise free to use their expert judgment and whatever method to produce the rank based on the information provided by cities. The ranking is usually most straightforward for the quantitative indicators, allowing direct comparison. However data gaps or weaknesses are often found. Required information that is missing from a city will generally lead to a lower ranking or even rejection.

When each expert has delivered her or his city ranking, a tentative total ranking is produced simply by adding ranks of all 12 areas assuming their equal significance for the urban environment. The resulting ranking is discussed among in the panel, and some adjustments may be made to the ranking. Finally the top 3-5 cities are put on a shortlist of finalists for the award. Shortlisted cities are generally those with the highest ranks on the final joint list.

The results of the whole evaluation process including the shortlist is presented to the Jury who will subsequently select the winner. The Jury consists of high ranking representatives a seven organizations concerned with the urban environment, chaired by the General Director of the European Commission's Environmental branch (DG Environment). The jury will base their decision on the expert evaluation report, as well as on their impression of the suitability of the shortlisted cities as potential role models for other European cities in their year as Green Capital. To support their judgment the jury invites cities to send representatives (often the Mayor and top city officials) to present their case directly for the jury

before the selection is made. Hence the winner will always be a city with high performance based on expert evaluation as well as a city with convincing visions and communication strategies.

4. Example: Transport Assessment

Local Transport can be seen as a strategic 'driver' area for other environmental impacts such as air quality, climate change and the acoustic environment, as well as an impact area in its own right. In the dimension of the 'present' the cities are asked to submit information on the four Local Transport indicators shown in Table 3. The indicators mainly focus on conditions for alternative modes to car, and to promote less polluting public transport systems. All indicators have relative values (shares) or have been normalized by city population. For indicator 1 "Length in meters of designated cycle lanes along roads" data submitted by cities often show a large variation. While some applicant cities have almost no cycling infrastructure, the better ones typically have near or over 1 meter dedicated separate cycle lane per inhabitant. For the indicator 2 "Proportion of population living within 300 metres of an hourly (or more frequent) public transport service" the cities are more similar with typical values of 85-90%, although some are lower, and a few are near 100%. While nearly all cities can draw data for indicator 1 from their inventories, data for indicator 2 need to be calculated for example using a GIS-based model, which cities have access to in varying degrees. Indicator 4 "Proportion of public transport vehicles classified as low emission vehicles" has allegedly raised problems for a few cities where bus transport is privatized and the

Table 3. Indicators used as part of the evaluation of performance on Local Transport

1. Length in meters of designated cycle lanes along roads (but physically separated from other traffic) in relation to the total number of inhabitants in the city (meters of lane per capita);
2. Proportion (%) of population living within 300 metres of an hourly (or more frequent) public transport service;
3. Proportion (%) of all journeys under 5 km by private car (as car driver or car passenger). Please describe the modes of transport included in calculating the car proportion;
4. Proportion (%) of public transport vehicles classified as low emission vehicles, meaning the proportion of buses among the publicly or privately owned and operated bus fleets that have certified lower emissions than EURO V emission standards.

data is therefore not as readily available as for cities with municipal fleets.

As already described the evaluation of the city takes into account much other information besides the four quantitative indicators. For Local Transport the cities are for example asked to describe their efforts and plans to reduce the need for individual motorised traffic (passenger and freight), to reduce congestion and improve regional mobility flows, to promote less polluting technologies, fuels, behaviours and practices for passenger and freight transport; and to adopt and implement so-called Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans. The evaluation take into account both the reported results and the credibility of the information provided by the city. The future plans for the cities are evaluated with a view to how broad, relevant and ambitions their goals are. But also how much dedication the city actually demonstrates to its goals via formally adopted plans, actually committed budgets, and the use of monitoring to keep track of progress and engage citizens. Cities with comprehensive planning frameworks and a history of monitoring are often able to present well considered measures based on lessons learned. One of the reason why winner cities like Stockholm, Hamburg, Copenhagen, Ljubljana also fared well in the transport evaluation was exactly their comprehensive schemes for sustainable mobility planning (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Shared bike systems is installed in many EGCA applicant cities like here in Copenhagen
(Source: <http://gobike.com/press/download-pictures/>)

5. Discussion of Some Strengths and Weaknesses

Despite now nearly seven years of history and growing interest in the EGCA not many studies have been made about it. The following discussion in is mostly based on the authors own reflections as member of the evaluation panel, and partly on published analysis material.

The most obvious strength of the award is the positive awareness it helps create about the urban environment without using strong regulations or expensive investments. The awareness raising can both be internal among citizens and stakeholders in the winning city, as well as external across European cities eager to learn from the practice and experiences of a winning city. According to some observations from winner cities, the attention from the public can also translate into economic benefits including is was noted in Stockholm “...a significant jump in interest in ecotourism “ (City of Stockholm 2011). However few actual studies documenting such results have been published.

It can also be considered a strength that the EGCA considers very broad areas of environmental performance combining quantitative and qualitative information. There are several examples where the application process has helped cities overcome compartmentalization by bringing different departments together. Such efforts are particularly acknowledged in the award through the inclusion of the twelfth criterion on Integrated Environmental Management. A network among shortlisted cities have been created in order to further exchange and collaboration in key areas.

In the transport area the award supports general efforts to promote more sustainable urban mobility planning and practice in accordance with European and national strategies. It acknowledges the significance of transport for the urban environment while considering the need for a broad range of green mobility options. It is not focussed on particular technological solutions, but encourage cities to innovate and experiment with new systems, while consolidating services for

public transport users and cyclists. It could envisaged that a certified Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan would become an eligibility criteria for applying for the award sometime in the future.

The potential weaknesses of the EGCA are several. First of all it is based on incomplete information. Few cities can provide data on all the required indicators, and the data are often not produced in the same way since there is lack of common standards for many urban environmental data. The evaluation process is reliant on data produced and delivered by the city themselves and there are limited opportunities for the evaluators to verify the information. On the conceptual side it has been criticised that there is not an articulated overall ranking attribute for the process, i.e. it is not really clear what is being measured in the ranking process (Meijering et al 2014). Also it can be critiqued that the individual indicators used are not explicitly justified and the composition of the full indicator set is not transparent.

Another issue is that there is no systematic follow-up on the actions and performance of the cities. While a monitoring system is considered a positive factor in the evaluation, there is no opportunity monitor, report or compare performance in the context of the award, once is has been handed out. The secretariat managing the award scheme is focused on the application and evaluation process, and not on the subsequent activities or accomplishment of the cities. This also means that there are no systematic efforts to assess the costs, benefits and results of the winning cities, or of the EGCA program as a whole. This could change in the future as the program matures, or of the emerging network of shortlisted cities would seek to establish a stronger evidence base.

6. Conclusion

The EGCA is a soft policy instrument of the European Commission. It promotes environmental awareness and green governance among European

cities through voluntary efforts. It has a broad approach covering several key aspects of the environment seen from an urban perspective. It is not a ranking system for cities per se, although a ranking procedure is applied as part of finding an annual award winner among the applicants. The ranking uses key indicators as well qualitative information submitted by cities themselves. The ranking conducted by experts is supplemented with a more political judgment of the shortlisted candidates' potential as role models. As such the EGCA can clearly not be seen as a mathematical scale to find the most sustainable city in Europe, but more as a mechanisms to help foster a culture of sustainable governance extending beyond the regulation of conventional environmental problems towards green innovations in cities more generally.

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